

THE CRAFTSMAN

PUBLISHED MONTHLY BY THE CRAFTSMAN PUBLISHING CO.
41 WEST THIRTY-FOURTH STREET, NEW YORK CITY

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VOLUME XXIV

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Western Advertising Office, 14 West Washington St., Chicago, Ill. 25 CENTS A COPY: \$3.00 A YEAR New England Office: 468 Boylston St., Boston, Mass.
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(tribute)

INSPIRATION



THE CRAFTSMAN has found a new friend, or perhaps we should say, discovered a new source of inspiration. The morning mail brought us a pamphlet about Lincoln. The name of Lincoln always arrests our attention, and this pamphlet was the wisest thing we had ever read about the greatest man we have ever known. Lincoln lived again in the little book, more closely to us, more intimately in our lives than ever before. His strength, his tenderness, his infinite kindness threaded every page we turned. Out of words was built up before us the presence of that great good man, until we were inspired and refreshed. Things were said about Lincoln that were of themselves a measure of greatness in the author. In speaking of Lincoln's simple life, he wrote: "Groves are better than temples, fields are better than gorgeous carpetings, rail fences are better than lines of kneeling slaves, and the winds are better than music if you are raising heroes and founding governments."

If you stop to think about it, Lincoln himself might have said these very convincing words, and it was living them that helped him to become a hero and to found a government. It has been said that there is no surer cementing for friendship than a similarity of affections, the craving for the same good thing. And so after we had read these great words about the man who understood groves and winds and knew fields better than gorgeous carpetings, we felt that we had found a new friend, one who told our own thoughts to us as we had dreamed them but never uttered them.

The qualities in Lincoln's character that impressed our new friend were these finenesses that could only be understood and reckoned with by a man possessing the same lodestar in life. It is surely true that we find in our friends what we need in them, a reflection of our own spiritual attainment, and we do not find what we are incapable of comprehending. And when a man says that "it is not life that counts in the making of the world, but character, and character is best formed amid those surroundings where every waking hour is struggling," then we know something of his own life and his own acceptance of the tragedies of life as the necessary rocks on which

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to build character. And we know that our friend understood Lincoln, his struggles, his sorrows, his unbending integrity, through the clear light of his own developed character.

"Give me," he says, "the hut which is small enough, the poverty which is deep enough, life that is great enough, and over all the fear of God, and I will raise from them the best there is in human character." Just loving Lincoln would not develop such understanding as this of what formed and molded and carved this splendid human monument of goodness, which is evoked for us today out of the simple word Lincoln. No man can write understandingly of the value of the poor things of life, the sorrows, the little miseries, who has not only experienced them but lived through them and grown *up* out of them, not *down* away from them.

WE became so interested in the Lincoln pamphlet that we sought other words by the author, and we discovered that he was not only a man of wisdom in speaking of men, but in speaking of modern conditions, practical things, that we are apt to take lightly or dully or indifferently. In the midst of a time when all nations were talking of peace and of peace conferences we found that he spoke of war in this very vital way, as we all must understand it. War, he felt, would last until the simple-heartedness of man, the goodness of the world, rejected it. "The fate of nations," he said, "is still decided by their wars. You may talk of orderly tribunals and learned referees; you may sing in your schools the gentle praises of the quiet life; you may strike from your books the last note of every martial anthem, and yet out in the smoke and thunder will always be the tramp of horses and the silent, rigid, upturned face. Men may prophesy and women pray, but peace will come here to abide forever on this earth only when the dreams of childhood are the accepted charts to guide the destinies of men."

This is undoubtedly what Christ meant when he said "except ye become as little children" The great minds of different nations have again and again reiterated this final truth, that through simplicity is goodness and greatness born; not through self-conscious intention, not through boasting or vainglorious achievement, not through the spectacular deed that wings in brilliant colors swiftly past the vision, but just simply and slowly and intensely, as arise the great forces in Nature, so are these forces revealed through the human being who for the moment becomes their channel.

The more we read of our friend, the more we found ourselves

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eager to know him,—what had bred this type of man, through what experience, through what joy or disaster had he reached the heights where he could see life so clearly, so truly, so kindly? And we found that he had been born on a farm, and that on his sixtieth birthday he had said to a friend: "I am hungry for the country life of my boyhood, eager again to see at all seasons the beautiful developments of Nature. Why should I continue to drudge for money? Money is not all happiness. I want to be where I can rise early in the morning, wander about the fields, study Nature again, breathe the pure air, write a little, gather my friends about me and sleep in the open air." A beautiful ideal that must have been born out of the memory of a very good and beautiful young age.

As a child, we felt, he must have gained through farm life the great lessons it had to teach, not just the drudgery or the sacrifice or the suffering alone. He must have found the early mornings on the hillside good, the hard work developing to his brain as well as his muscle. He must have slept well, this little lad, and worked well and found his own rich joys to have held the memory of these days down through half a century until it was transmuted into the ideal for the close of his life.

The more we read about him, the more we heard of him through his friends, the more we found here and there in newspaper clippings, in little pamphlets, the words of crystal wisdom that he had uttered in the stress of great conflicts, the more surely we realized that this man whom we had only just discovered was in reality that rare thing in the world today, a great philosopher; not a self-conscious teacher, with his starlike theories of life submerged in many words and bound in leather, but the human philosopher, the man whom men needed, the man who spoke the wise word in the hard hour of cruel strain, in the moment of restless confusion of issues, at the time when he faced enemies, disloyalty, disillusion. We saw this man, whose philosophy was, in fact, developed by his close relation to the conflict of his own age, as a man who never had the trite word for any situation, great or small, but who honored all relationships of life with the response born of sincere thought, who did not feel it beneath the hurried, worried man of business to express his thoughts in language so simple, so beautiful as to merit their preservation in the best of the literature of his age.

How completely the memory of his early days stayed with him as he grew older, how they enveloped his life, spreading tender wings of consolation over him, we can perhaps best judge by his appreciation of the same quality in Lincoln when he writes: "Abra-

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ham Lincoln's strength arose, it seems to me, from the preservation through all his life of that fondness for his early home, of the tender recollections of his family and their struggles, which kept his sympathy always warm and young. He was never so great but that the ties of his youth still bound him. He was never so far away but that he could still hear the note of the evening birds in the groves of his nativity."

And in summing up Lincoln's place in the world's history, he again employs the line of thought which makes you realize his own understanding of Nature and her forces: "Lincoln was not small in anything. He was carved in deep lines, like all heroic figures, for dangerous altitudes and great purposes." What a gigantic and splendid understanding this last phrase presupposes of the purpose of adversity. For what, after all, are the great tragedies of our existence but the chisel in the hand of Fate that is carving those who are worthy in deep lines for dangerous altitudes and great purposes?

The more we thought of the understanding of our friend of the truths of life (and after all, philosophy is only the understanding of these truths and the power of expressing that understanding) the more we felt that we must become intimate with those details that had molded his existence, rounded it out and carved the deep lines. We perhaps came to this conclusion slowly, because so much had come to us through the philosophy of the occasional word we found, that while we were eager to know him better we felt the intimacy of a lasting friendship already established.

With his name on our lips and his high words in our hearts, we opened the morning paper a few days ago to read of his death, back on the farm where he had lived as a boy, and to which he had returned but a short time to live out those last beautiful years of his life as he had planned them, out of doors. Those of our readers who have followed the career of Frank S. Black, even casually, will have discovered before this who our new-found friend is, this friend whom we have never seen, and perhaps will have already felt in their own hearts the budding of friendship for the man whose words were so tender with kindness that the goodness of his soul reached out to those who could never touch his hand.

We discover through the accounts in the newspapers that Mr. Black was only sixty years old when he died at the zenith of a brilliant career, a famous and good lawyer, a man whose life in the political arena was without a blemish, who stood at the head of his State while Governor of New York, an heroic figure of integrity and accomplished purpose, who gave up public life at what seemed

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scarcely the completion of his power for good, because he must live once more the life of his boyhood.

In a way, it has seemed to us a very tragic thing that a man who had accomplished so supreme an ideal out of the restless confused detail of life should have been swept away before a wider opportunity reached him to bring these ideals more intimately to the world needing them, for certainly this is a period in our national growth where an ideal of right human relationship is more essential, perhaps, than at any other time in our history. We are growing into a vast complicate power, our old religious symbols are vanishing one by one, as unequal to the task of spiritualizing the civilization of today, and our commercial activities and successes have given us commercial standards which are greatly lowering our spiritual activities. The human relations of not only this nation but of others are becoming disintegrated and uncertain. There never has been a time in the history of our country when we stood in greater need of the philosophical utterance of some clear lucid soul, simple and unafraid, and it seemed as though this strong, needed spiritual utterance had begun to flow from the mind of this farmer-statesman out to the world only long enough for us to realize its value and then to lose it.

But, as a matter of fact, such utterances are never lost. It is impossible to drown in the whirlwind of any complex civilization the utterance of truth. No necessary words of Lincoln's have ever vanished from the memory of the people who needed them, and who continue to need them. The philosopher apparently is born at the time when the world craves the word he has to say. The very sincere man becomes a channel for that truth from the source of life, that must flow out at different intervals to save humanity. And when it comes, the thirsty world will absorb it to the last definite expression. A very little truth is yeast enough to leaven a very troubled and sordid civilization.

And so we have grown to feel less poignant regret that our friend has gone away, because we realize as we look out over the world and into the history of the way in which truth comes to us from time to time, that we have not lost our friend or any single good word that he has ever spoken, that he is ours for all time, and that we are stronger for all time for knowing him.

EDITOR'S NOTE: THE CRAFTSMAN will be glad, if enough requests are received to warrant it, to republish Mr. Black's pamphlet on Abraham Lincoln, and to send it free to any subscriber who would like to own a copy.

